

FULL-CYCLE

My great-aunts —
sturdy Missouri farm girls —
used rags.
They washed them out by hand
and hung them to dry
along with the rest of the
family laundry
on long rope clotheslines
behind the main house.
It was no more distasteful to them
than scrubbing the latest baby's
soiled diapers
or scooping out the chicken coops
or emptying the steaming night buckets
into the outhouse every morning.

My mother used Kotex,
purchased at the local pharmacy.
The druggist would secret the box
from under the counter
and they would avoid
looking at one another
as he rang it up.
Mother stored her used napkins
in the back of her bedroom closet
until it was time to incinerate
the yard clippings.
They gave the entire room and
all her clothing
a faint aroma of dried menstrual blood.
But no self-respecting lady
ever put her sanitary pads
into the city trash cans
where the men of the household
might see them and be offended,
or the garbage collectors
make lewd jokes.

When I was a girl
we had two brands to choose from
and 200 horror stories to exchange —
about the girl whose pad fell off
in the middle of the sidewalk
right in front of the most popular
boys at school,
and how a boy could tell
if you were having your period
just by looking into your eyes,
and you couldn't take a bath
or ride a bicycle
or participate in P.E.,
because something terrible

might happen to you —
only nobody ever
told us what.

The Kotex Company
finally published a pamphlet
obscurely entitled
"Are You In The Know?"
It was illustrated with cute cartoons
of young women dancing, skating,
doing jumping jacks,
even taking a shower —
all while on their period.
Wanda, the biggest slut
in our seventh grade class,
always carried a pamphlet in her purse.
Whenever she saw a boy nearby,
she would sneak it out
and show it off to her friends,
and they would giggle and gag
and shriek hysterically
as if they were looking at
a Tijuana Bible.

My daughters
get to choose from an enormous
and colorful assortment of tampons,
mini-pads, maxi-pads, panty-liners,
panty-shields, pads with little
butterfly edges so your underpants
won't get stained, and all of the above
for light days, medium days, and
heavy days — scented or unscented.
They toss them into their grocery carts
along with the fresh vegetables
and cans of ravioli.
If the price won't register
on the glass computer plate,
the clerk yells through the intercom,
"Hey, Joe! I need a price-check on
super-absorbant, scented, Maxi-Pads —
Aisle Six!"
And nobody even bothers
to look up from their copies
of The National Enquirer.

SUPER WOMAN

My girlfriend, Mary Ellen,
didn't have to work.
The interest alone
from her Daddy's trust fund